



# ALASKA NATIVE TRIBAL HEALTH CONSORTIUM

Environmental Health & Engineering

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 1, 2019

FROM: Youth Outreach Volunteer in Service to America (VISTA), DEHE

SUBJECT: Trip Report – Newtok – Introduce GAO representatives to the community of Newtok and meet with the Newtok Village Council – September 11-12, 2018

TO: FOR THE RECORD

### **OBJECTIVE:**

- Communicate the successes and challenges of Newtok's relocation effort to the Government Accountability Office (GAO)
- GAO meeting with Newtok Village Council (NVC) to discuss the council's experience regarding the relocation and acquisition of support and funding.
- Address key considerations for relocation guidebook with village council
- Career SI presentation to students; meet new principle and inform him and other teachers of Liz Wulbrecht's youth outreach and education and career development work

### **ATTENDEES:**

- Marleah LaBelle, ANTHC
- Gavin Dixon, ANTHC
- Elizabeth (Liz) Wulbrecht, ANTHC
- Karen, GAO
- Lisa, GAO
- Joe, GAO

### **FINDINGS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

On Tuesday, September 11, 2018, the traveling party flew to Bethel via Alaska Airlines, arriving in Bethel at approximately 11:41 am. The party continued on to Newtok via a Grant Aviation plane, arriving at approximately 16:00. The traveling party continued on to the Newtok school, where they discussed the school, Newtok village, and the community's culture and resources with the GAO employees Karen Chen, Lisa Van Arsdale, and Joe Thompson. Gavin and the three GAO representatives then traveled to Mertarvik for a site visit, spending the night at Mertarvik's construction man-camp.

The site visit in Mertarvik focused upon previous projects completed and the challenges faced for those projects from technical, managerial, and administrative standpoints. Additionally, the team reviewed current projects, future projects, and the positives and negatives of the approach for each project. Again, discussion focused primarily on managerial and administrative

challenges with agency regulations, funding requirements and preferences, and on the unique technical and practical requirements of the relocation.

Marleah and Liz settled into the school. Between 19:00-19:45, Liz spoke with local youth mentor Bosco Charles about his recent trip to the Native Youth Community Adaptation and Leadership Conference in West Virginia with three Newtok high school students. This story will be used as a community story in an upcoming Newtok Relocation Quarterly Newsletter. At 20:00, Marleah and Liz participated in women's basketball night.

#### Newtok School visit and NVC Meeting

At approximately 9:00 Wednesday morning, Marleah and Liz introduced themselves to the school's students and gave the Career SI presentation on job opportunities at ANTHC to Newtok's seniors. In addition, they talked about distance learning programs, opportunities at APU, and other career opportunities throughout the state. Following this 40-minute discussion, Liz talked with the principal about her role at ANTHC and how she can be an advocate for Newtok's youth. After this discussion, Gavin, Marleah, and the GAO representatives attended a meeting with the Newtok Village Council. On the way to the meeting, Gavin showed the GAO representatives the community's water treatment center and post office.

At approximately 11:00, the NVC meeting with GAO commenced. The council, ANTHC employees, and GAO representatives introduced themselves. The GAO employees discussed their reason for being in Newtok: to learn about the challenges and successes of relocating an entire community due to climate change. They explained that they are assessing our current federal system of addressing climate change impacts and how this system can be improved.

GAO representatives wanted to learn about NVC's interaction with federal agencies and acquisition of funding. They also wanted to learn about Newtok's cultural practices, subsistence lifestyle, and the community's overall experience with a changing environment and eroding landscape. GAO's interviews with government officials and communities like Newtok will contribute to a report on recommended changes to government policy, including funding distribution, and a prioritized list of communities in need of relocation. This list will be informed by each community's ability to provide their own funds for relocation, risk of climate change, and the health risks of staying put.

The NVC was encouraged to ask the GAO questions. They were most curious about the product resulting from the GAO's visit. GAO explained that the product would be a report directed to congress, not concrete changes to federal policy. The NVC explained that their biggest challenges with federal agencies/policy have stemmed from the reactive Stafford Act and FEMA. The Stafford Act and FEMA were designed to respond to major and single events such as Tsunamis, hurricanes, and earthquakes that do not persist over time. Erosion in Newtok occurs every year and the damages accrue over time, not in any single event.

Bernice brought over Akutag for the guests to enjoy. The GAO employees were curious about the subsistence and seasonal lifestyle of Newtok's residents and the history of Newtok's

settlement. Romy emphasized that by relocating the community, we are preserving their culture and identity.

After talking for three hours, the meeting participants broke into smaller groups. The GAO employees continued to ask questions of NVC members. Liz and Marleah talked with Paul Charles, Simeon, and Catherine about the relocation guidebook. They discussed the format of the guidebook, its purpose, and questions that must be answered for the guidebook's content creation. Paul mentioned that establishing some method of fire prevention in the community is extremely important to him. After another 2 hours of discussion, Gavin showed the GAO employees the erosion of Newtok and Newtok community buildings. Liz and Marleah talked further with Romy and Bernice about the guidebook, making them aware of planning and logistics issues to be addressed, such as moving people from their homes to Mertarvik, packing, and perishables.

At approximately 17:00, the GAO employees returned to Bethel via Grant Aviation. At approximately 19:00, the ANTHC team returned to Bethel via Grant Aviation and continued on to Anchorage, arriving at approximately 22:00.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSIONS**

- Identify resources and funding for rural fire prevention
- Look into potential resources for providing food and totes to people moving
- Identify the number of trailers, ATVs, and side-by-sides NVC can devote to the move

cc: Gavin Dixon, [gndixon@anthc.org](mailto:gndixon@anthc.org)

ec: Marleah LaBelle, ANTHC, [mmlabelle@anthc.org](mailto:mmlabelle@anthc.org)

Romy Cadiente, NVC, [bunjing2@gmail.com](mailto:bunjing2@gmail.com)

Andrew John, NVC, [wwt10nnc@gmail.com](mailto:wwt10nnc@gmail.com)

Elizabeth Wulbrecht

